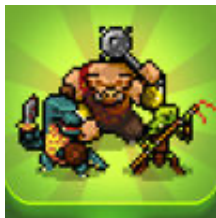


RPG Reload File 021 – 'Knights Of Pen And Paper'

[January 15, 2015](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)



Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the **RPG Reload**, the weekly feature where we're not afraid to go meta from time to time. Each week, we take a look at an RPG from the App Store's past. Why would we do such a thing, you ask? Well, just because a game didn't come out this week, it doesn't mean it's not worth playing. This feature gives us a chance to revisit, reflect, and take a deeper dive than the usual scope of our reviews allows for. I try to schedule out a good variety of RPGs, but just to keep me on my toes, once per month I turn the choice to you, the reader. Simply vote for the RPG you'd like to see featured by commenting below, posting the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#) in the forums, or by tweeting me at [@RPGReload](#), and you might just see your game appear here next month. The next reader's choice feature will be in the first week of February, so get those votes in.

You know, in spite of my stated goals of getting a good mix of RPGs in this feature, I must admit that I've leaned a bit towards ported games. That's not a bad thing, of course, since they're great games and they often fit mobiles to a tee, but now that we're getting along in the lifespan of **RPG Reload**, I want to make sure I'm not ignoring original RPGs with a mobile design philosophy in mind. Luckily, it's the readers to the rescue, since a couple of you kindly offered up *Knights Of Pen & Paper* ([\\$4.99](#)) for this month's reader's choice. It's a great example of an RPG built around the strengths and typical use of a mobile device, offering up bite-sized fun delivered in a clever way. I'm not sure how the Steam release did for developers Behold

Studios, but personally, I can't imagine playing this game any other way than on my mobile. It just fits perfectly.

I'll go into the reasons for that in a little bit, but let's start off with the requisite history lesson. It'll be a short one this time, I promise. *Knights Of Pen & Paper* is the product of Behold Studios, a relatively small Brazilian indie developer. They were founded in 2009 and have released a few other games aside from *Knights*, but none of them are nearly as well-known or highly-regarded. Presumably they did well enough to keep the studio moving along until the release of *Knights Of Pen & Paper* on iOS and Android in October of 2012. The game received critical acclaim and players loved it, prompting Behold Studios to release a PC version of the game on Steam the following year. It's a well-maintained game, with numerous additions and updates made fairly regularly over the last couple of years, including a fairly hefty content pack as recently as October of 2014.

You can tell the game is a passion project, which makes it all the more wonderful that it seems to have paid off for the developers. *Knights Of Pen & Paper* is not without its failings, but it's hard to get terribly upset with the game simply because its enthusiasm is so evident. The basic premise has you playing as a group of role-players who are playing a pen and paper RPG. Yes, *Inception*, Xzibit, whatever meme you want to use here. The players, the dungeon master, and the table they're seated at is always visible on the screen, creating the impression that everything going on behind them is just a collective work of imagination. These characters playing characters will often comment on the game within the game, lending the game a unique identity without going into full-on parody. As for who is sitting at the table, that's eventually entirely up to you.

In the world of *Knights Of Pen & Paper*, money talks. When you start the game, you can only fill two of the chairs at the table, and your only choice for a dungeon master is the default bearded fellow that everyone seems to know. As you earn more money in-game, you're able to unlock three more

party members, swap out the DM for a variety of interesting alternates, and buy decorations for the table and the room you're playing in. Each of these additions brings special effects with it, like a boost to experience points, health regeneration, and so on. The first few things you can buy are quite cheap, like a third party member, the ability to add fourth and fifth members when you can afford them, or the ability to fight up to seven enemies at once, but after that, things get pricey. Rounding out your party is the first order of business, and you should be able to do that fairly easily. Buying everything, however, is more than most will manage during the course of a single playthrough. That said, you in no way need most of the stuff that can be bought with coins.

Each of your characters is a combination of a person and a character class. Character classes are obvious enough, but the people you choose bring specific effects with them, such as a bonus to dice rolls or additional enmity from your foes. Some people play certain classes better than others, and you can play with that fact to make things easier or harder on yourself. That's actually the first instance of a theme that runs through the game. *Knights Of Pen & Paper* is a very customizable game in a lot of ways. Most of the fights in the game allow you to choose how many opponents you'd like to take on at once. Taking on lots of baddies in a single fight brings additional rewards, but more than that, it also cuts down on how much grinding you need to do.

That's a good thing, because no matter how you slice it, there's a fair bit of grinding in this game. The basic structure has you going from location to location, solving quests presented by NPCs. These quests involve collecting items, killing monsters, escorting someone to another location, and so on, but what they always come back around to is battling scores of fiends. If a mission has you collecting carrots, you can be sure those carrots will be pulled from the fresh corpses of enemies. This battle-heavy focus is the main reason why I couldn't imagine enjoying this as much in longer sessions on my TV. I enjoy grinding up levels as much as the next gamer, but unless the battle system is top shelf, there's only so much of that I can take without

a break.

The battle system here is decent enough, and certainly intuitive with touch controls, but the balance of the game is kind of weird and lumpy, so once you reach a certain point, just about every fight will consist of the same overpowered tactics, no matter what kind of enemy you're up against. It's perfect for zoning out on while you're trying to pay attention to something else, but when you get to the point that you're slicing through an entire screen of enemies like they're nothing, the game loses a lot of its appeal. Granted, by that point, you've almost certainly gotten your money's worth out of the experience, but it's regrettable that a game that starts off so strong ends up being a bit of a chore in its back end. You'll either have to push yourself through it or take it in smaller bites where the repetition won't get to you quite so badly.

I'd strongly recommend the latter course of action, since even in those waning hours, *Knights Of Pen & Paper* is a lot of fun when you take it a bit at a time. Pop in, fight some battles, fill in some of the percentage on a location, gain a level or two, enjoy a few jokes, then pop out. Playing the game this way, you can appreciate its strong points without growing weary of its weak points. The game seems to be set up to play it this way, since it's easy to tell where you should go next and which locations still have missions to clear even if you forget where you were when you last left off. It helps that the overarching plot tying all the quests together is less remarkable than the moment-to-moment dialogue you find in each quest. The game doesn't take its main plot all that seriously, and neither should you.

I think ultimately that's one of the best things about *Knights Of Pen & Paper*. It feels so friendly and familiar, and it's always ready to break the tension with some kind of weird joke. It's like hanging out with a bunch of old friends from a time when your worries were a lot smaller and life was a lot simpler. In that light, the faux-retro visuals and audio clearly aren't just there because that was a popular thing to do at the time, but because they are working in

tandem with the rest of the game to evoke those feelings of nostalgia, not for gaming's past, but for your own. I think that's why I like the game as much as I do. When I break it down mechanically like I've done over the course of this article, it feels like I shouldn't be so fond of it, but when I start playing it, I feel pretty content. It's also why I can see how the game doesn't work for some people. If it fails in its gambit to befriend you, it's not likely you'll be satisfied with everything else it's trying to sell you on.

Knights of Pen and Paper +1 Edition Old School Release Trailer

That's my take on *Knights Of Pen & Paper*, but what do you think? Because of the way the game is set up, I could definitely see people's experiences covering the whole range. I want to hear what you think, so please comment below, post in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#). Don't forget to vote for the next reader's choice article, which will be in **RPG Reload File 024** in February. I also encourage you to get excited for the upcoming **RPG Reload** podcast, featuring me, Eric Ford, and a *mystery* third chair. We'll be talking about the subject of **RPG Reload File**

023, along with some other fun stuff. If all goes according to schedule, you can look forward to that at the end of the month. As for me, I'll be back next week to cover another RPG from the past. Thanks for reading!

Next Week's Reload Hint: *You can't type its name without using a special character.*